

\c2\Germany
5 April 1989

Notes on Trachtenberg, The Berlin Crisis

Starting page 50:

How could it be that "the question of German military power, and especially German nuclear forces" was "understood all along" by Ambassador Thompson in Moscow and Ambassador Bruce in Bonn to be "of fundamental importance to the Soviets" yet that: "This issue in fact evidently did not receive much attention at the highest levels of the government; it was never treated by Eisenhower and Dulles--or for that matter by Kennedy and his associates--as the most central issue, the real heart of the problem"?

Is Trachtenberg saying that a U.S. misperception, at the highest levels, was at the heart of the Berlin Crisis, or its persistence and intractability? A failure to listen to Khrushchev; or to such diplomats as Thompson (supposedly so valued in the Cuban Crisis) or Bruce?

Were the highest officials even aware of this as a major issue, let alone the central issue? How could this be? (Speaking for myself, on the far periphery of this issue but at least an informed newspaper reader, participant in the Cuban Crisis and earlier, the Berlin Game, and having had, by some accounts, an historically critical influence on the events in 1961 via the Gilpatric speech, I had never heard a hint of such considerations from 1958 on.

I would be surprised to discover that this "notion" was at all familiar to Mort Halperin, or even Harry Rowen: he certainly never passed it on to me. My first clue was reading in Adam Ulam's book a few years ago that the crisis could have been averted by US assurances against giving nuclear weapons to Germany. Since reading that, I have looked for other confirmation, and found little; when I saw Ulam at the Faculty Club last month, I was tempted to ask him what he based this on.

Now Trachtenberg makes that unnecessary, at least so far as official sources go. Are all these newly declassified, in the last ten years? What was available earlier; how familiar was this awareness?

Is MT saying that these two administrations simply missed the point of the crisis--and thus, perhaps, of the Cuban Crisis? That they could have turned it off by concessions that, in fact, they didn't even consider? Would they have been willing to do that? Adenauer was "the problem," in Norstad's eyes, against a security zone in Central Europe where armaments would be limited (nuclear-free zone? No US weapons?); but would he have objected to a restriction--perhaps de facto--against German possession of long-range nuclear weapons (absent recognition of East Germany)?

Or was it, given Adenauer's resistance, that the high

officials simply couldn't make the offers? Even so, the US could simply have refrained from giving Germany such weapons, or continuing to talk about it. Kennedy could have further delayed--as apparently Eisenhower did--the deployment of IRBMs to Europe.

MT asks: "If the German nuclear weapons issue was in fact the key question, why was it neglected by the administration? Part of the reason is that the Soviets, in diplomatic contacts, did not stress the issue nearly as much as one might have expected. It was not that this issue was ignored completely in these discussions; it simply was not played up as the heart of the problem?" 51

But why were the Soviets so reticent? And how did Thompson and Bruce come to understand that it was fundamental; what did they base this on? Earlier (p. 6) MT says: "During the crisis, over and over again, Soviet public statements stressed this theme: West Germany was going nuclear, and this was bound to create an extraordinarily dangerous situation. [MT gives no references for this] But was this all just propaganda, or did these pronouncements reflect genuine Soviet concerns?"

Did the Soviet officials simply fail to stress this in private because they took it for granted? If so, they may have made a big mistake. A closely related, and perhaps parallel issue: the Soviets frequently referred in public to their fear of new attacks on Cuba. Did they stress this concern in private? My impression is no, at least in the contacts in August and September that are always cited as conveying their "deceptions". (They did stress that the armaments they were sending were "defensive" but did not, as I recall--CHECK--emphasize fears of imminent invasion, calling for any denials by the Americans).

At any rate, the public charges of American invasion plans were always treated as absurd propaganda, even at fairly high levels in the US Government (curiously, so far as one can tell from the record, even at the highest levels, which knew about Mongoose and invasion planning: can this be? Or does it just reflect their dissimulation during the crisis and ever afterwards?). Yet they were not only believed by the Soviets: they were true, and the highest levels knew it!

The same would appear to be true of the central issue of the Berlin Crisis: which was thereby a major issue of the Cuban Crisis as well (though the Soviets have not yet admitted the linkage of the two, and the Americans continue to appear oblivious of this issue).

p. 55-56 MT appears to be unaware that the issue of "how big these limited operations [following on a small probe, "testing intentions"] would have to be before they triggered a general war" was resolved in the later Eisenhower years, on the basis of the definition of general war, contrary to his guess that "it seems

that they were never really fully resolved in the Eisenhower period, although there was at least in the earlier part of this administration a tendency to move toward general war fairly rapidly."

He quotes a 1955 JCS answer that what "limited military force" really meant would depend on conditions at the time, implying that the JCS preferred to keep options open. But he asks, "Was it anticipated, for example, that in such an operation nuclear weapons would inevitably be used, or was this issue left open?" (55) In fact, the definition of general war--"armed hostilities with the Soviet Union"--was meant precisely to preclude any concept, or preparations for, limited war with the Soviet forces.

In particular, it ruled out, as a form of conflict with the Soviet Union, limited nuclear war: something that could arise, in principle, only with an antagonist other than the Soviet Union (such as China, in the Quemoy crises). Thus, US Basic National Security Policy and the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan ruled out any form of limited nuclear war other than unilateral US use of nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear power. (Actually, this was a realistic notion of when limited nuclear war was feasible, then or now).

[I take it the documents aren't available on this yet. Likewise, it appears that documents aren't available from Vienna. Or Paris? CHECK with MT.]